

**Alex Gawronski**

**'The Invisible Man'**

**Artspace, Sydney**

**interviewed by Caraline Douglas, Artspace**

**1. Your current project *The Invisible Man* attempts to conceptualise the interrelationship between the institution of art, its audiences and the spatial models that house it. Can you tell me what inspired you to create a work that examines this relationship and how you go about doing so in *The Invisible Man*?**

The original inspiration for *The Invisible Man* was largely prompted by two interrelated concerns both vaguely utopian. The first is my ongoing involvement with establishing and running artist spaces. The second was my reconsideration of the historical legacies of so-called 'institutional critique'.

In the first instance, the relationship of quasi-autonomous self-initiated curatorial and exhibition practices to more visible commercial and government funded ones is complex. Artist run spaces allow a comparative immediacy of response, are relatively mobile and flexible. At best they are critically engaged quasi- autonomous spaces eschewing a particular (though non-atrophied) vision of contemporary art. From this perspective they are capable of forging productive two-way relationships with diverse institutions for diverse ends.

In the second instance, I was considering how so-called 'institutional critique' had come today to seem so passéist (regardless of its undeniable reemergence in an international context). A large part of this it would seem, particularly from the perspective of the 'institutional critique' of the 1980's, was artists attempts to literalise the critiques they were making on the institutions that agreed to exhibit them, an entirely paradoxical scenario. The piece might also be seen to re-engage with particular historical legacies of conceptualism, those of Marcel Broodthaers and Bruce Nauman for example.

*The Invisible Man* on the hand is a 'museum fiction' that takes as its content the spaces of exhibition and the various implications of 'exhibiting', of appearing (or not) in public. In this case, the institution, quasi-autonomous or otherwise, becomes a fictional site of its perpetual re-imagining.

**2. *The Invisible Man* is both an art object and gallery, can you tell me about the different elements that are included in the work and how you went about envisioning and installing this work at Artspace?**

*The Invisible Man* is essentially a large-scale construction, a room- within-a-room. It incorporates site-specific video as well as black and white photography.

The work was very much conceived for the specific architectural context of Artspace (although it could successfully be reworked for other spaces). As a built container within the gallery - a kind of anonymous surrogate gallery - the work was expressly designed to encompass four of the pillars of the Artspace gallery that houses it. On site, the structure appeared to literally 'parasitise' the existing architecture.

The logistics of installing the work were crucial: once the shell of the gallery-object was completed it was then filmed 360° around its perimeter as though by an anonymous invisible presence. This video, revealing at close range the structural aspects of the piece, was then screened inside the work. Although anti-narrative, the video nonetheless suggests that the gallery-object has been literally turned inside out.

In addition to the video, each corner of the work was photographed from a fixed point with a camera set to the appropriate light reading. The black and white prints of these photographs were then housed in frames that extended uncannily around the corners of the built structure. These 'documentary' photographs suggested further the photographic 'grey card', the ground zero of all photographic representation. Similarly, they were also the 'blind corners' of the work, that in the process of revealing through framing, actually concealed more than they disclosed: representation while pretending to be realer-than-real transforms lived experience into abstraction. As objects, these frames additionally emphasised the 'inside-outness' of the work, as did the timber railing directly beneath them that circumnavigated the work.

### **3. In this work, who do you propose is the invisible man? The viewer, the artist or both?**

*The Invisible Man* in the context of this installation is effectively both the artist and viewer. The work is installed to appear as though the agency of both artist and viewer had been appropriated by the physical structure of the built gallery-object itself, as though the structure were imagining itself subjectively in the absence of either creator or audience. Figuratively, *The Invisible Man* could equally be a woman as in either instance he or she remains invisible or absented.

### **4. As one of the founders of I.C.A.N. (Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown) does this influence your practice?**

Yes, my long-term involvement in artist run spaces, and over the past five years with I.C.A.N., definitely influences both my practice as an artist and as a writer. I.C.A.N. was established as a means of developing a particular

critical/exhibition framework in which to develop ideas. There is a certain flexibility, mobility and autonomy in developing projects at I.C.A.N.

*The Invisible Man* hints at such mobility. However, as a fictional space-within-a-space the installation is not a realistic illustration for a model of autonomy. It is rather a consideration of the irreducible relationship between quasi-autonomous models and other models to which they are attached and which shape the climate of contemporary culture more publicly.